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Does Co-worker Incivility Increase Perceived Knowledge Hiding? The Mediating Role of Work Engagement and Turnover Intentions and the Moderating Role of Cynicism

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Drawing upon the conservation of resources theory, we investigate the serial mediation relationship between co-worker incivility, work engagement, turnover intentions and knowledge hiding. We also examine the moderating effects of employee cynicism in the incivility–knowledge–hiding relationship through work engagement. We found that the negative relationship between co-worker incivility and knowledge hiding is complex and mediated by work engagement and turnover intentions. Incivility, as a negative workplace stressor, triggers a negative work-related state of mind (work engagement) and withdrawal cognition (turnover intentions), which in turn lead to knowledge hiding (behaviour). Finally, the mediated relationship between incivility and knowledge hiding through work engagement was moderated by cynicism, such that the association is more robust when cynicism is high.

Introduction

Knowledge hiding can be uncooperative behaviour that negatively impacts individual, team and organizational performance (Xiong *et al.*, 2019); however, it is pervasive in workplaces (Connelly *et al.*, 2012; Peng, 2013; Singh, 2019). The effects of individual and organizational factors, such as leadership style, knowledge culture, work environment and individual characteristics, on knowledge hiding are well investigated (e.g. Jiang *et al.*,

2019). Extant literature also investigated the role of leader–member exchange (Zhao *et al.*, 2019), distrust (Connelly *et al.*, 2012) and workplace bullying (Yao *et al.*, 2020), amongst others, that may influence knowledge hiding in the organization. Apart from the factors described above, it has been identified that the quality of the interpersonal relationship impacts knowledge hiding (Connelly *et al.*, 2012; Cortina, 2008; Jha and Varkkey, 2018; Khalid *et al.*, 2018; Serenko and Bontis, 2016; Yao *et al.*, 2020; Zhao *et al.*, 2019). One interpersonal relationship that has emerged as a hotspot in research on knowledge management is workplace incivility (Aljawarneh and Atan, 2018; Arshad and Ismail, 2018; Irum, Ghosh and Pandey, 2020; Wu *et al.*, 2014). However, these researches are quite limited and several relevant research gaps persist.

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The first research gap is the absence of a fine-tuned understanding of why and under what circumstances co-worker incivility translates into knowledge hiding. While extant literature recognizes the linkages between workplace incivility and knowledge hiding (Arshad and Ismail, 2018; Irum, Ghosh and Pandey, 2020; Venz and Shoshan., 2022), theoretically, the research has failed to distinguish the circumstances under which co-worker incivility predicts knowledge-hiding behaviour in the organization (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011; Ashkanasy, 2011; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011). Therefore, we address this limited specificity in the existing literature on workplace incivility and knowledge hiding by arguing that co-worker incivility reduces work engagement, which in turn augments employee turnover intentions and leads to knowledge-hiding behaviour. The second research gap is the inadequate attention to complexities embedded in the workplace incivility–knowledge hiding relationship. Extant research tends to focus on workplace incivility in general (Cortina, 2008; Leiter *et al.*, 2011; Miner *et al.*, 2012; Porath and Pearson, 2013) rather than on co-worker incivility specifically, which has the potential to harm work engagement and promote turnover intentions and knowledge hiding in the organization. We address this research gap in the available literature by arguing that co-worker incivility is likely to cause knowledge-hiding behaviour via work disengagement. Knowledge hiding is discouraged through organizational policies and processes (Guenter, van Emmerik and Schreurs, 2014); however, knowledge hiding is ubiquitous and employees engage in such devious behaviour for a reason, but the available research (Anand, Agarwal and Offergelt, 2023; Singh, 2019) has failed to adequately answer ‘why people hide knowledge’. Therefore, in this study, we have made a scientific attempt to explain why, how and when co-worker incivility results in knowledge hiding in the organization.

To examine *how and why* co-worker incivility promotes knowledge hiding, we rely on conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). COR theory posits that resource gains and losses are important pathways to understanding resource investment behaviours (Hobfoll, 1989). Drawing from COR theory, the study takes a resource-loss perspective to test the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions that explain the relationship between co-worker incivility and knowl-

edge hiding. We argue that incivility drains employees’ work-related motivational state of mind, after which the cognitive effort to conserve the resource and avoid further loss of resources results in knowledge-hiding behaviours (Escartín, Salin and Rodríguez-Carballeira, 2011; Magee *et al.*, 2017; Obeidat, Qan’ir and Turaani, 2018). We identify engagement as a work-related state of mind that will be impacted by experiencing incivility (Cameron and Dutton, 2003; Kahn, 1990). Our choice is based on the established relationship between psychological connections between stress factors and work engagement. From the COR point of view, employees experiencing stress (e.g. co-worker incivility) experience resource loss that impacts their work-related state of mind (e.g. Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Studies have also established that such depleted physical, cognitive and emotional resources (Maslach and Leiter, 2008) stimulate employee intention to disassociate (turnover intentions) from the cause of stress and avoid further resource loss (Tett and Guterman, 2000). This explains our choice of turnover intentions as the cognitive variable. The link between work engagement and turnover is consistent with the idea that emotional states strongly affect cognition and subsequent behaviours (Miner and Glomb, 2010).

An essential tenet of COR theory is that personal resources can impact the intensity of responses (Hobfoll and Lerman, 1989). Personalities as resources have been found to aggravate or alleviate employee responses to negative workplace situations. One personality trait found to accentuate employee response to negative workplace situations is cynicism, which involves harmful cognitive, affective and behavioural elements. Although the role of negative personality resources in knowledge-hiding relationships is examined as a whole (e.g. Aljawarneh and Atan, 2018; Anand, Offergelt and Anand, 2022; Jiang *et al.*, 2019), the role of cynicism in the proposed relationships is untested. Different types of negative personalities may have varying impacts on knowledge hiding. Thus, embedded in COR theory, our study examines how a workplace event (i.e. incivility) affects a person’s work-related state of mind (i.e. work engagement) and withdrawal cognition (i.e. turnover intention), which eventually influences individual behaviour (i.e. knowledge hiding). The study also examines the boundary role of cynicism in the incivility–knowledge–hiding relationship.

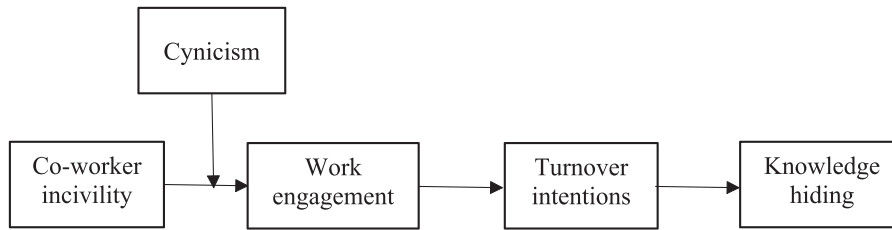


Figure 1. Conceptual model

Our study makes several contributions to the theory and practice of knowledge hiding. Firstly, it extends our understanding of the subject by testing a sequential chain of potential work attitude–cognition resource losses and its behavioural effects due to co-worker incivility. This study also explains the border circumstances whereby co-workers’ rude behaviours transition into knowledge-hiding behaviours in the organization. Examining mediating mechanisms is a critical theory-building component that expands scholars’ and practitioners’ knowledge of *why* certain processes occur in organizations (Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan, 2007). Expanding possible mediation processes is also necessary for explaining the unaddressed question of causality between co-worker incivility and outcomes. Secondly, the study sheds light on co-workers’ incivility–knowledge hiding linkage. The findings of our study suggest that knowledge hiding is triggered by more variables than detrimental interpersonal interactions alone. Furthermore, our study suggests that knowledge hiding may also be the outcome of a negative attitude–withdrawal intention chain that seeks to legitimize an individual’s psychological detachment from their task and organization. Thirdly, our study adds precision to the COR-informed predictions by proposing a personal resource (cynicism) as a boundary condition for the mediating pathways, thus addressing calls for increased precision in COR-based research. By examining the serial mediation model, this study also answers the call for more research on the role of multiple reactions before knowledge hiding. Contributing to the nomological framework of COR, the study examines four COR-related resource variables to test the mediating relationship and boundary conditions. Fourthly, this study adds to the body of knowledge on employee turnover, a phenomenon that is costly for organizations due to replacement costs

and lost knowledge. Finally, the findings of this study have practical implications for organizations seeking to understand, predict and manage knowledge-hiding behaviours to enhance workplace climate and performance. Figure 1 summarizes the conceptual model to be examined in this study.

Theoretical background and hypothesis development

Knowledge hiding pertains to the intentional refusal of knowledge requests (Connelly *et al.*, 2019) by exhibiting any of three different forms of behaviour: playing dumb (pretending not to have the knowledge); rationalized hiding (offering reasons for not providing the knowledge requested); and evasive hiding (providing incomplete information) (Connelly *et al.*, 2012, 2019; von der Trenck, 2015). Knowledge hiding reduces reciprocity (Černe *et al.*, 2014) and harms interpersonal relationships (Connelly *et al.*, 2014; Evans, Hendron and Oldroyd, 2015). While there have been some efforts to examine the outcomes of knowledge hiding, studies examining antecedents of knowledge hiding are very recent (Černe *et al.*, 2014; Connelly *et al.*, 2012; Singh, 2019; Škerlavaj *et al.*, 2018).

Incivility, engagement and turnover intentions

Incivility is defined as a low-intensity deviant behaviour with an ambiguous intent to harm (Miner *et al.*, 2012). It goes against organizational norms for respect and is considered a major social stressor. It is a prevalent and severe problem in business organizations (Porath and Pearson, 2013) and has attracted increasing academic attention in recent years (Cortina, 2008; Leiter *et al.*, 2011; Porath and Pearson, 2013).

COR theory posits that employees' work behaviours are informed by their desire to avoid resource losses and achieve resource gains (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002). Work engagement is a 'state of mind characterized by vigorous attention and dedication to work and a high level of enthusiasm at work' (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004, p. 234). Co-worker incivility negatively affects individuals' work-related mental state and leaves them physically less energetic, dedicated and absorbed in their tasks (Chen *et al.*, 2013; Kahn, 1990). Studies have examined the negative association between incivility and work engagement (Chen *et al.*, 2013; Mackey *et al.*, 2019; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

Another reaction found in uncivil behaviour targets is cognitive disassociation from the organization and the deliberate desire to look for new jobs (Tett and Meyer, 1993). Incivility discourages individuals' sense of belonging to the organization and encourages employees to consider other job options to avoid additional job losses (Griffin, 2010; Miner-Rubino and Reed, 2010; Wilson and Holmwall, 2013).

As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, extant literature provides evidence of the linkages between incivility and work engagement (Chen *et al.*, 2013) and turnover intentions. The negative association between work engagement and turnover intentions is also studied (Agarwal and Gupta, 2018; Saks, 2006). Employees decoupling from work and withdrawing physically, mentally and emotionally will also make efforts to disassociate from the source of resource loss, which could be the organization. However, the interplay of incivility, work engagement and turnover intentions is intuitive and has been examined in a piecemeal manner (Trichayadinata *et al.*, 2020).

Building on extant literature, this study takes a resource-loss perspective and tests the sequential interplay between co-worker incivility, work engagement and turnover intentions using the resource-loss approach. COR theory is beneficial for explaining this underlying mechanism because this theory is based on the notion that psychological connections or stresses are a function of the possible loss of such resources. From the COR theory point of view, when employees have fewer resources because of uncivil co-worker behaviour, their work-related state of mind will likely deteriorate as they have access to fewer psychological resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Moreover, in such an environment, they are less likely to feel motivated

because they have to spend their valuable resources (e.g. time, energy and social relationships) in dealing with the potential threats or problems from their co-worker's uncivil behaviour. Subsequently, employees are less likely to experience higher levels of engagement. Meaningful association with tasks (i.e. work engagement) is one of the retention factors, a lack of which motivates them to quit (Brotheridge and Lee, 2002; Cropanzano *et al.*, 1997; Vigoda-Gadot and Drory, 2006). Thus, co-worker incivility first impairs work-related attitudes, resulting in higher turnover intentions. Based on this reasoning, we posit that co-worker incivility leads to a loss of engagement, which impacts employee turnover intentions. Therefore, we propose:

H1: Co-worker incivility will positively and indirectly affect employee turnover intentions via engagement.

Incivility, turnover intentions and knowledge hiding

People have an innate and learned drive to create, foster, conserve and protect their resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002). Once depleted, resources are difficult to regain (Byrne *et al.*, 2014; Hobfoll, 1989). Knowledge is valuable, rare, hard to imitate and a non-substitutable resource (Brown, Treviño and Harrison, 2005; Chan, Li and Pierce, 2014; Jiang *et al.*, 2019). It is considered a source of power and competitive advantage that individuals seek to preserve (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014; Holloway and Galvin, 2016). Knowledge creation is an intensive process, and individuals who create it tend to feel control and ownership over it (Von der Trenck, 2015).

Employees experiencing interpersonal disrespect and mistreatment from their co-workers withhold their knowledge as defensive behaviour to guard their self-created resources. Victims of incivility are likely to seek revenge on co-workers by deliberately attempting to be non-resourceful to them regarding knowledge (Aldrich and Pfeffer, 1976; Evans, Hendron and Oldroyd, 2015). However, we propose that incivility does not result directly in knowledge hiding. Intentionally refusing knowledge sharing, and non-cooperation with information exchange, can impact task performance and efficiency, since tasks are interdependent. Employees intentionally withholding information may be subjected to restraints in organizational processes and procedures. Employees may

be prompted to engage in knowledge hiding for two reasons. First, employees may be motivated to protect their resources when they intend to quit their organization due to co-worker incivility they have experienced (De Clercq, Haq and Azeem, 2018). Employees may hold on to that knowledge gained with time and effort (Brown, Treviño and Harrison, 2005), to gain bargaining power and political advantage over their peers (Jiang *et al.*, 2019). Second, the ramification and consequences of hiding knowledge may not act as a deterrent if they are considering only a limited period of employment with the current organization. Thus, we propose:

H2: Incivility will indirectly affect knowledge hiding through turnover intentions.

Serial mediation

Thus far, we argue that incivility reduces engagement and increases turnover intentions. We also argue that employees who experience incivility and turnover intentions will exhibit knowledge-hiding behaviours. Adding to an integrated understanding of knowledge hiding, we consider that the proposed affective–cognitive–behavioural responses to incivility are not piecemeal but sequential and call for empirical examination (Mavin, Grandy and Williams, 2014; Michalak, Kiffin-Petersen and Ashkanasy, 2019; Yao *et al.*, 2020).

Using COR theory, we posit that employees, when experiencing negative interpersonal relationships with co-workers, will experience a depleted physical, cognitive and emotional state (Maslach and Leiter, 2008), which leads to a high turnover intention that will, in turn, trigger knowledge hiding. Co-worker incivility, engagement, turnover and knowledge-hiding relationships are consistent with the idea that workplace events impact emotional states, which affect subsequent behaviours (Miner-Rubino and Glomb, 2010; Wright and Bonett, 1997). Non-availability of a conducive work environment impairs employees' work-related state of mind and makes them more susceptible to quitting the environment that triggers stress, to avoid resource losses and conserve resources. It is well established that employees' need for engagement and task meaningfulness is a primary driver for continued employment. Recently, the fact that a record number of employees are quitting or thinking about

doing so, has again established that employees crave human interactions and engaging work. Social and interpersonal connections (i.e. co-worker relationships), as well as emotional connection with tasks, can go a long way to giving organizations an edge in attracting and retaining talent (<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/great-attrition-or-great-attraction-the-choice-is-yours>). Contrary to this, negative interpersonal interactions such as co-worker incivility drain resources and prompt actions to distance oneself from tasks and from the context where the episodes of incivility take place. This depletion of resources, combined with a withdrawal from one's tasks, is likely to result in the withdrawal of behaviours that exceed standard organizational requirements (knowledge sharing). Informed by extant literature, our reasoning and hypotheses above suggest a serial mediation model.

This mediation chain is in line with the COR notion that workplace mistreatment could drain employees' energy levels to the extent that they seek to conserve rather than expend discretionary energy (Hou, Li and Yuan, 2018). Adverse work events trigger an attitudinal and cognitive response, which impacts individual behaviour. Thus, we hypothesize:

H3: Co-worker incivility will be positively related to knowledge-hiding behaviour through the mediating influence of work engagement and, in turn, employee turnover intentions.

The moderating role of employee cynicism

COR theory focuses on resource investment, acquisition and protection. Resources are defined as 'those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for the attainment of goals' (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 516). The theory argues that individuals lacking personal resources are keen to preserve their limited resources (Buchwald and Hobfoll, 2004; Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014; Hobfoll, 1989). When faced with resource consumption situations, individuals with limited personal resources fall into a losing spiral, which accelerates, consuming their resources (Buchwald and Hobfoll, 2004; Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014; Hobfoll, 1989). One resource-deficient individual trait

studied in the literature examining negative workplace situations is cynicism (Jiang *et al.*, 2019).

Individuals with high cynicism have strong ‘beliefs of unfairness and feelings of distrust’ (Bommer, Rich and Rubin, 2005, p. 123) and suspect others to be deceitful, with strong malevolent intentions (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018; Xu *et al.*, 2018). Due to limited personal resources, such individuals tend to appraise and respond more intensely than those with higher personal resources (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). Building on this premise, we suspect that uncivil co-worker behaviours may lead employees with high cynicism into a higher loss spiral, further exacerbating the adverse effects of incivility on work engagement (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014; Hobfoll, 1989).

Thus, we propose that individuals with high levels of cynicism will amplify the negative impact of incivility on work engagement. Therefore, we propose:

H4a: Cynicism will moderate the negative effect of incivility on work engagement, such that the effects of incivility will be stronger for those who have high cynicism levels.

In the preceding paragraphs, we argue that cynicism could increase the salience of incivility and aggravate the adverse effects of incivility, such that those who have high cynicism will experience lower work engagement. By integrating cynicism’s amplifying effect into the COR model of incivility, we can reason that cynicism accentuates the negative impact of incivility on work engagement and aggravates the mediated effects of incivility on knowledge hiding via reduced work engagement (Nolen-Hoeksema and Morrow, 1991). Individuals with high cynicism may experience repeated strong negative emotions that will reduce their physical, emotional and psychological association in work roles (i.e. work engagement), which will have a higher impact on knowledge hiding. Based on the above analysis, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4b: Cynicism will moderate the strength of the mediated relationship between incivility and knowledge hiding via work engagement, such that the mediated relationship will be stronger for those with high cynicism.

Methodology

Sample and procedure

Given the focus of the study, we considered collecting data from employees working in knowledge-intensive multinational enterprises (MNEs) in operations in India. Each of these firms employed more than 2500 employees, and the nature of tasks was highly interdependent and undertaken in teams. These organizations were from among India’s most internationalized industries. The targeted respondents of the survey were the managers who worked in teams.

One of the authors of this study contacted Human Resource (HR) managers in the MNEs through LinkedIn, and we followed it up with in-person meetings. During in-person meetings, we explained the study objectives, implications and procedure for data collection. We approached 12 MNEs, but only three organizations (consulting, financial services and IT-ITES services) consented to participate in the study. Data were collected from 17% in consulting, 43% in financial services and 40% in IT-ITES organizations. Employees held positions such as software engineers, software managers, architects and project managers. Participation was voluntary, and the respondents were assured of the anonymity of their responses.

Upon our request, the HR managers of all the organizations invited a random sample of 1200 managerial employees (working in teams of more than two) who represented different departments and job levels. An online questionnaire-based survey was used to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire was in English as this is the preferred language of communication in Indian industry. Attached to each questionnaire was a cover letter explaining the study’s objectives and assuring respondents that the study was voluntary and their responses would be confidential. We also provided one of the authors’ contact information in case respondents had any questions or inquiries; an email with details of the research objectives, confidentiality and voluntary nature was sent to participants as a hyperlink.

To address the issues of data collected using online surveys, in line with recommendations (Smith *et al.*, 2016), we inserted three trap items in the survey (e.g. ‘Please do not choose 4 for this item’). Only surveys with all trap questions answered correctly were regarded as valid responses. Various

procedural efforts were undertaken to minimize common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Podsakoff, 2012), including counterbalanced survey items and assurances of anonymity and confidentiality (Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Podsakoff, 2012). We collected data twice, with a lag of three months to minimize the common method variance and strengthen internal validity. We chose this time lag because an individual's psychological reactions to his or her own behaviour, and behavioural reactions to his or her own psychological experiences, could occur relatively quickly (e.g. Chaiken and Baldwin, 1981; Salancik and Conway, 1975), and it is a sufficient time lag to avoid common method variance.

In Time 1, employees were asked to identify one co-worker from the team they worked closely with and from whom they had experienced incivility. To avoid undue burden on participants to complete questionnaires for multiple co-workers and rule out the possibility of within-group differences in response to knowledge-hiding behaviours by the same employee, we asked the participant to fill in responses related to only one of his/her co-workers. These employees responded to demographics, co-worker incivility and work engagement. Thus, we followed the same procedure as used in Butts, Becker and Boswell (2015) and Panaccio and Vandenberghe (2012) to collect data in Time 1 on co-worker incivility and work engagement. However, we explained to the participants the general nature of the study but did not disclose any specific hypotheses and assured them of confidentiality. Once the employee completed the questionnaire, one of the authors contacted the referred co-worker to seek their consent to fill in the knowledge-hiding questionnaire. Similarity codes were used to match received dyad responses. In Time 2, measured after a gap of three months, employees responded to turnover intention measures and cynicism.¹

A total of 750 dyads volunteered for the study and were distributed the survey questionnaires; from these, 610 dyad-completed questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 81%. After discarding the cases with mismatched dyads, missing values and erroneous responses to the trap questions, the remaining 587 matching dyads were

used to assess the hypothesized model. In this study, 77% were male, the average age was 38 years, the average work experience was 4.1 years and the average tenure of working with a co-worker was 2.8 years. The demographic data of co-workers (reporting knowledge-hiding behaviour) were: 67.7% men, with an average age of 38.53 years (SD = 6.17) and average organizational tenure of 7.35 years (SD = 4.79). The average team tenure was 3.57 years (SD = 2.80).

Early and late-returned surveys were compared to determine nonresponse bias (Armstrong and Overton, 1977). The t-statistics yielded no significant differences ($p = 0.48$), suggesting that nonresponse bias was not a serious concern. All the variance inflation factors were considerably lower (4.0) than the recommended threshold of 10.0, suggesting that multi-collinearity was not a problem (Hair *et al.*, 2006).

In line with standard practice, missing values were identified by pairwise deletion (Little and Rubin, 2002) for all tests, which is consistent with earlier studies (e.g. Hsu, Fournier and Srinivasan, 2016). This procedure ensured that missing data values were deleted, and hence confirmed that we were using actual data rather than a mean of the samples (Allison, 2009; Baraldi and Enders, 2010; Hair *et al.*, 2014). We wanted to maintain a strong level of precision and power for the estimates, so we deleted only cases that contained missing values in each pair of variables instead of deleting entire cases (that is, row-by-row), which could have considerably reduced the sample size (Allison, 2009; Hair *et al.*, 2014; Little and Rubin, 2002). Moreover, the only missing data related to cynicism, amounting to 4.4% of the total data, which is less than the acceptable maximum level of 15% recommended by Hair *et al.* (2014).

To test for attrition bias, we ran a multinomial logistic regression analysis, entering T1 variables (co-worker incivility and work engagement, and sociodemographic variables) as predictors of a multi-category variable reflecting (non)participation across two categories (1 = participated only at T1; 2 = participated at both T1 and T2). Pseudo- R^2 effect sizes were small, ranging between only 0.003 (McFadden's R^2), 0.11 (Cox and Snell's R^2) and 0.021 (Nagelkerke's R^2). Taken together, these results suggest that attrition bias was only a minor concern and does not undermine the representativeness of the final sample.

¹In Time 2, we again collected responses on co-worker incivility. The direction of relationships with core constructs is as expected.

Measures

Knowledge hiding was measured using a scale developed by Connelly *et al.* (2012) measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a very great extent). The respondents (those from whom knowledge was hidden) were provided with the following statements: 'For a moment, visualize in your mind your co-worker who receives a knowledge request from you: how does he/she behave?' One of the sample responses was 'This colleague offered some other information instead of what I wanted'. To enhance the robustness of our findings, in line with extant literature (Arain *et al.*, 2020; Singh, 2019), responses to knowledge hiding were also collected from the focal employee. For the employee self-reports of knowledge hiding ($\alpha = 0.90$), all items were prefaced with the statement 'I ...' in order to refer to the self. A sample item is 'I pretend that I do not know the information'.

Cynicism was measured using Turner and Valentine's (2001) seven-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree). Higher item scores indicate higher degrees of cynicism. A sample item of the scale is 'People are only interested in themselves, not others'.

Incivility was measured with Cortina *et al.*'s (2001) five-point response scale. An example item is 'How often have you been in a situation where your co-worker made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you?'

Work engagement was measured using a scale developed by Barrick *et al.* (2014) on a five-item Likert scale (Barrick *et al.*, 2014; Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010). A sample item of the scale is 'I devote a lot of effort and energy to the assigned work'.

Turnover intentions were measured using a scale developed by Wayne, Shore and Liden (1997), wherein respondents responded on a five-item Likert scale. A sample item was 'I am seriously thinking of quitting my job'. One item was reverse-coded.

Control variables in this study included age (Peng, 2013), gender (Hershcovis *et al.*, 2017; Peng, 2013) and tenure in the organization (Peng, 2013; Wang and Noe, 2010) of the perpetrator (i.e. the knowledge hider), as they have been found to impact the variables under study (e.g. Peng, 2013). Age was measured as a continuous variable. Gender was modelled as a categorical variable, with

0 coded for women and 1 for men. Employee job tenure was measured as service years and modelled as a continuous variable. Since data were collected broadly from various organizations, rating disparities were likely. Therefore, we performed a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine these differences. The ANOVA comparing organizations on the research variables showed that F values were significant for all the variables. Mean differences were expected as the organizations differed in their business processes and challenges. Post-hoc analyses based on Scheffe's test were conducted to test whether pairs of mean differences among variables formed a pattern. The results did not yield a pattern that could be used for clustering organizations for further analyses. We also ran the analysis with and without control variables. The main findings remain significant and in the same direction (Bernierth and Auinis, 2016).

Results

Measurement model

AMOS 24 with maximum likelihood estimation procedures was employed to run confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and obtain the factor structure of focal variables. We tested for discriminant validity and compared chi-square statistics among different models in the latent structure analysis. Table 1 shows that the improvement in chi-square in the series of models was significant at all levels. The proposed five-factor model (incivility, work engagement, turnover intentions, knowledge hiding and cynicism) displayed the best fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.9$, $p < 0.00$; NNFI = 0.93; CFI = 0.91; SRMR = 0.04; RMSEA = 0.05). As shown in Appendix 1, all average variances extracted in the analysis are larger than the squared pairwise correlations for all three studies, suggesting the discriminant validity of the measuring instruments.

Results suggest that five measuring instruments had high convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), as the standardized loadings of items on the intended construct were ≥ 0.701 and AVE ≥ 0.721 , thus indicating the one-dimensionality of the measurement scale (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) (see Appendix 1). The standardized loadings for items measuring cynicism ranged from 0.714 to 0.923, 0.765 to 0.876 for knowledge hiding, 0.711 to 0.912 for work engagement items, 0.704 to 0.923 for

Table 1. Results of confirmatory factor analysis of the measurement models

Measurement models	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	TLI	p-Value	SRMR	CFI	RMSEA	NNFI
Hypothesized model: Five-factor model (co-worker incivility, cynicism, work engagement, turnover, knowledge hiding)	1559.4	527	2.91	0.90	0.00	0.04	0.91	0.05	0.93
Four-factor model (combining co-worker incivility + work engagement, cynicism, turnover, knowledge hiding)	1709.2	531	3.22	0.62	0.01	0.07	0.75	0.10	0.91
Three-factor model (combining co-worker incivility, work engagement and turnover intentions into one factor)	1789.5	535	3.30	0.57	0.00	0.09	0.71	0.10	0.92
Two-factor model (combining co-worker incivility, cynicism, work engagement and turnover intentions into one factor)	2001	538	3.31	0.57	0.00	0.06	0.72	0.13	0.68
One-factor model (co-worker incivility + cynicism + work engagement + turnover + knowledge hiding)	2221	540	4.10	0.43	0.00	0.94	0.59	0.12	0.77

Abbreviations: GFI = Goodness of Fit Index; NNFI = Non-Normed Fit Index; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

incivility items and 0.904 to 0.809 for turnover items. The average variance extracted (AVE) for knowledge hiding, incivility, cynicism, work engagement and turnover intentions was 0.72, 0.73, 0.74, 0.71 and 0.75, respectively. On the other hand, the composite reliabilities were 0.83, 0.80, 0.87, 0.86 and 0.81, respectively (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

Hypothesis testing

Descriptive statistics and correlations of all study variables are displayed in Table 2.

We used Model 6 of the SPSS PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2013) to test our proposed serial mediation model (Table 3). Our study also examined the indirect effect of incivility on knowledge hiding through work engagement (H4).

As hypothesized (Table 3), incivility is found to be positively related to turnover intentions ($b = 0.64$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$) and negatively related to work engagement ($b = -0.24$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < 0.001$). Work engagement is negatively related to turnover intentions ($b = -0.32$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.001$). The indirect effect of incivility on turnover intentions through work engagement is significant (indirect effect = 0.06, 95% CI = [0.53, 0.75]), showing evidence for H1.²

Our results also show that incivility is positively related to knowledge hiding ($b = 0.34$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$) (see Table 3). The positive relationship between incivility and turnover intentions has been established ($b = 0.64$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$). Turnover is positively related to knowledge hiding ($b = 0.16$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = 0.001$). The indirect effect of incivility on knowledge hiding through turnover intentions is significant (indirect effect = 0.11, 95% CI = [0.04, 0.19]), showing evidence for H2. Thus, work engagement and turnover intentions are found to mediate the effects of incivility on knowledge hiding (Table 3).

After testing a simple mediation of work engagement and turnover, which suggests partial mediation, we tested the serial mediated effect (incivility → work engagement → turnover intentions → knowledge hiding) (H3) using SPSS Macros Model 6 A 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence interval. Based on 5000 simulations, the result shows a significant serial indirect effect (indirect effect = 0.01, 95% CI = [-0.01, -0.02]). Thus, H3 is supported (Table 3).

To test the moderation (Aiken, West and Reno, 1991), we mean-centred the predictors involved in the interaction so that the main effects reported in Table 3 are easier to interpret. We found a significant interaction between incivility and cynicism

²When we retested our hypotheses with the knowledge-hiding measure obtained from the focal employee (instead

of the scores obtained from the co-workers), the direct effect was significant.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and correlations among study variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Age	27	4.6	1								
2 Gender	1.2	0.46	0.23**	1							
3 Tenure	3.2	3.0	0.94**	0.22**	1						
4 Incivility	3.7	0.66	-0.12**	-0.04	-0.16**	(0.90)					
5 Work engagement	4.1	0.63	0.04	-0.05	-0.09**	-0.021**	(0.87)				
6 Turnover intentions	2.4	0.102	-0.46**	-0.03	-0.08*	0.46**	-0.029**	(0.85)			
7 Knowledge hiding (co-worker)	5.90	1.10	-0.02	-0.11*	-0.05	0.41**	-0.16**	0.14**	(0.75)		
8 Knowledge hiding (core employee)	4.72	1.34	-0.07	-0.012*	-0.03	0.31*	-0.12**	0.12*	0.21**	(0.81)	
9 Cynicism	3.91	1.46	-0.05**	-0.01	-0.10**	0.29**	-0.19**	0.21**	0.24**	0.11*	(0.91)

Note: n = 587 (alpha reliabilities are given in parentheses). *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

in employees' work engagement (b = -0.06, p = 0.001; see Figure 2). The effect of incivility on employees' work engagement is stronger at high levels of cynicism (1 SD above the mean; b = 0.49, SE = 0.10, p < 0.05) and weaker at low levels of cynicism (1 SD below the mean; b = 0.22, SE = 0.05, p < 0.001), as can be observed from simple slope tests, thus supporting H4a.

We further explored H4b by testing whether cynicism moderates the indirect effect of incivility on knowledge hiding through work engagement. We used the SPSS PROCESS as per Preacher, Rucker and Hayes' (2007) recommendation. Following Preacher, Rucker and Hayes' (2007) recommendation, high and low cynicism levels are set as one standard deviation above and below the mean score of cynicism. As hypothesized, the indirect effect of incivility on knowledge hiding via work engagement varies between high and low cynicism levels (Figure 2). Table 4 shows that the indirect effect of incivility on knowledge hiding is significant and more robust at high levels of cynicism (indirect effect = -0.05, 95% bootstrapped CI = [-0.02, -0.15]). At low levels, cynicism is significant but weaker (indirect effect = -0.01, 95% bootstrapped CI = [-0.04, -0.20]).

Discussion and conclusions

This study proposes that co-worker incivility reduces work engagement and leads to employee turnover intention and knowledge-hiding behaviour in the organization. In this study, we tested the moderating role of cynicism, given its established relationship with adverse interpersonal treatment. The findings of the study suggest that co-worker incivility first impacts employees' work-related motivational state of mind, after which cognition to conserve the resource intention triggers turnover and knowledge-hiding behaviours (Escartín, Salin and Rodriguez-Carballeira, 2011; Magee *et al.*, 2017). Cynicism as a personal resource accentuates employee interpretation and response to negative workplace experiences. By examining the work situation-attitude-cognition-behaviour relationship, this study extends our understanding of *how* interpersonal mistreatments influence knowledge hiding (Hannah, Schaubroeck and Peng, 2016). Specifically, it shows the antecedents of knowledge hiding by demonstrating that knowledge hiding results from

Table 3. The mediating role of work engagement and turnover relationships

	Hypothesis	Work engagement			Turnover intentions			Knowledge hiding					
		b	SE	t	P	b	SE	t	p	b	SE	t	p
Age		0.01	0.01	11.5	0.32	0.04	0.01	13.5	0.32	0.01	0.01	11.5	0.52
Gender		-0.02	0.03	-5.21	0.14	0.03	0.04	4.21	0.44	-0.02	0.03	4.12	0.34
Tenure		0.05	0.01	-5.52	0.04	0.07	0.05	2.52	0.34	0.05	0.01	3.12	0.14
Main effects													
Incivility		-0.24	0.03	5.21	0.001	0.64	0.05	11.51	0.001	0.34	0.05	10.5	0.001
Work engagement						-0.32	0.06	-5.52	0.001				
Turnover intention										0.16	0.04	10.1	0.001
R ²		0.12		0.15		0.23							
Indirect effects of incivility													
Via work engagement	H1					<i>Bootstrapping value</i>							
						0.06							
						(0.533, 0.751)							
Via turnover intentions	H2					0.11							
						(0.044, 0.192)							
Path													
Total indirect effect													
Specific indirect effect decomposition													
Incivility → work engagement → Turnover						0.121							
						(0.0507, 0.198)							
Incivility → turnover → knowledge hiding						0.121							
						(0.014, 0.054)							
Incivility → work engagement → Turnover → knowledge hiding	H3					0.097							
						(0.034, 0.164)							
						0.01							
						(-0.012, -0.021)							

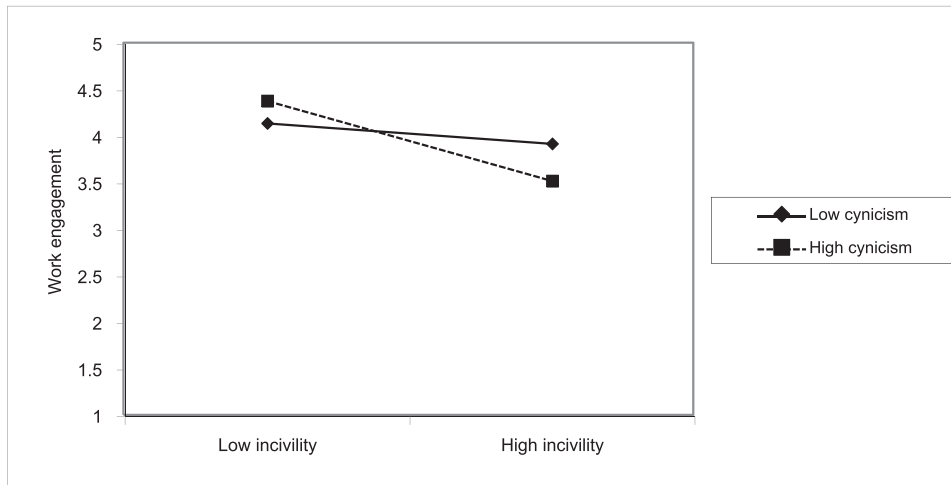


Figure 2. The moderating role of cynicism in incivility–work engagement relationship. Note: $n = 587$ (alpha reliabilities are given in parentheses). * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4. Moderated mediation results for incivility across levels of cynicism on knowledge hiding

Moderator cynicism	Conditional indirect effect	Bootstrap SE	Bootstrap LLCI	Bootstrap ULCI
<i>Dependent variable = knowledge hiding; Mediator = work engagement</i>				
–1 SD	–0.01	0.01	–0.04	–0.20
Mean	–0.03	0.01	–0.00	–0.05
+1 SD	–0.05	0.04	–0.02	–0.15
Index of moderated mediation	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.07

Bootstrapping $n = 5000$.

an interplay of work situations, psychological mechanisms and personal dispositions. By adopting a person–situation interactionist approach to examining knowledge hiding, the study adds to our knowledge of the qualifying effects of individual differences on the relationship.

Theoretical implications

Our study has four theoretical implications. Firstly, how co-workers treat one another has an impact on how they behave. In organizational behaviour research, incivility is an emerging phenomenon compared to other interpersonal mistreatments (e.g. Andersson and Pearson, 1999). Researchers have so far made the assumption that co-worker incivility causes knowledge-hiding behaviours without adequately examining potential intervening mechanisms, which limits our understanding of how things are connected to incivility in the workplace. The study makes a contribution by pointing out that two crucial phases – work-

related state (work engagement) and cognition (turnover) – are necessary for co-worker incivility to cause knowledge hiding in the organization. As a result, the findings of this study help to pinpoint the specific underlying mechanisms necessary for organizational interventions that are successful (Walton, 2014).

Secondly, this study contributes to the knowledge-hiding literature by testing a serial mediation model. Examining two potential pathways at once – work-related state and cognition – is necessary, since the underlying psychological processes have not been conceptualized and empirically verified in prior studies. Thus, the study develops insights into co-workers' incivility–knowledge hiding. The findings of the study show that knowledge hiding is more than just a result of poor interpersonal relationships. Our study suggests that knowledge-hiding behaviour is also the result of a negative attitude–withdrawal intention chain that aims to justify a person's psychological separation from their task and organization, leading to knowledge hiding (Wang *et al.*, 2019). These

discoveries offer novel insights into the ‘why’ and ‘how’ issues of knowledge hiding that extant literature has so far failed to explain adequately.

Thirdly, the findings of our study suggest how cynicism influences the relationship between co-worker incivility and knowledge hiding, thus offering a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and making an important contribution. These findings also contribute to our understanding of how personal resources influence how employees interpret and react to unfavourable experiences of knowledge hiding in the organization. By using COR-informed mechanisms, this study illuminates how co-worker incivility and knowledge hiding are linked in the organization.

Fourthly, this study contributes to the body of literature on employee turnover, a costly HR outcome for the organization – not least due to replacement costs and the loss of the organizational knowledge base. According to the findings of our study, work engagement and uncivil behaviour serve as critical predictors of employee turnover intentions. This illustrates the argument that knowledge hiding is a complex phenomenon and that individual differences (e.g. personality, role identity and knowledge) are important in elucidating the reasons why and when an employee leaves the organization (Agarwal and Gupta, 2018; Offergelt *et al.*, 2019).

Practical implications

This study has implications for organizational practices to reduce incivility and turnover on the one hand and enhance work engagement on the other. We found that incivility and knowledge hiding are serially mediated by employee engagement and turnover intentions. Individuals do not respond rationally to an adverse workplace incident like a co-worker’s incivility. Firstly, such an experience results in the loss of physical, emotional and psychological resources (i.e. work engagement) and stimulates cognitive arousals (i.e. turnover intentions), which in turn influences the employee’s behaviour (i.e. knowledge hiding). Thus, organizations should take proactive, preventive and educational approaches to prevent incivility at work. It is entirely plausible that offenders do not recognize their behaviour as uncivil. As an educational measure, regular formal training on civility, using role-playing and recording, both verbal and

non-verbal, can help employees identify incivility. As a proactive measure, organizations must adopt HR policies and practices to discourage uncivil behaviour on the one hand and provide voice mechanisms and other HR interventions for aggrieved employees to seek justice on the other (Cooke and Saini, 2015). Organizational reward systems and processes should align with a culture of civility. Collegiality should be considered in performance reviews, and organizations should take complaints and grievances seriously. As a preventive measure, organizations should avoid incivility in the workplace by hiring for civility.

Secondly, engagement is not a transitory phenomenon; thus, procedural interventions such as building a culture of respect, dignity and fairness can go a long way towards stimulating employee engagement (Schneider *et al.*, 2009). Introducing training programmes focusing on building positive emotional states will alleviate turnover intentions (Salanova, Bresó Esteve and Schaufeli, 2008).

Finally, despite organizational attempts to reduce incivility, perceptions of interpersonal mistreatment cannot be eliminated, and one’s dispositions can shape the intensity with which one responds to such perceptions. Organizations should be aware of individual differences and how personality traits intertwine with work situations and employee motivation. Thus, organizations can consider recruiting employees who have a positive outlook through psychometric testing (Agarwal and Gupta, 2018) and continue to foster such a positive attitude through continuous training and development.

Limitations and direction for future research

This study has limitations with implications for future research. First, the study did not differentiate tacit and explicit knowledge hiding, nor did it separate the three sub-dimensions of knowledge hiding, that is, evasive hiding, playing dumb and rationalized hiding, which future studies should investigate. Second, using the same theoretical framework, future research may consider examining potential mediators such as self-efficacy or emotional exhaustion, moral disengagement (Liu and Berry, 2013), sleep disorders (Manville *et al.*, 2016) and forgiveness (Barclay and Saldanha, 2016). Third, this study examined team members’ knowledge hiding only; future studies could extend the scope

by exploring knowledge hiding at the organizational level. Finally, though sufficient to alleviate concerns over common method variance, the multi-source and multi-wave survey data collected in this study are insufficient to establish or prove causal relationships between the variables. Thus, future research could profitably conduct a quasi-experiment where field subjects are not required. Instead, virtual simulations could be utilized to test the effects of incivility on knowledge hiding and how these effects can vary across individuals. In addition to experiments, future research seeking to establish causal inferences between the variables may also utilize a design that can accommodate repeated measures to gather longitudinal data that can provide more robust evidence to support causal relationships between the variables.

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examine some of the tensions, challenges and implications associated with these topics for various key stakeholders, such as the state, employers' associations, trade unions, workers and labour non-government organizations.

Supporting Information

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